



STATE OF TENNESSEE

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State's Students Gained Ground, Lost Some through 1992 Education Improvement Act

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Tennessee students are better off in most areas but are standing still in others as a result of the 1992 Education Improvement Act, a new study by the state Comptroller's Office of Education Accountability shows.

Students who graduate this spring are the first to reap the full 12 years of benefits from sweeping changes, things like compulsory kindergarten and computer education, mandated by the law and partially financed by a half-cent sales tax increase. The tax increase raised Tennessee's public school spending by \$1.1 billion from the 1991-1992 school year to 2001-2002.

"Tennessee's student attendance rates have improved since 1992, particularly in grades 7-12," the report noted.

Yet, the report said, "Tennessee has one of the lowest graduation rates in the nation."

The Education Improvement Act drastically changed the way the state distributes education funds to school districts based on ability to pay.

The state Senate Education Committee last year asked the Comptroller's Office of Education Accountability to study the Education Improvement Act. The report is the result of that study.

Among the gains, Tennessee public school students are scoring higher on the American College Testing (ACT) entrance exams, but they still score below the national average. Since the law's implementation, a higher percentage of high school graduates are attending college, but the percentage of 18-year-olds who graduate from high school has not risen.

On another front, the percentage of college freshmen requiring remedial and developmental courses dropped from 55.7 percent in 1992 to 50.2 percent in 2002.

Educational attainment is a factor in success in the workplace. Tennessee's overall wealth in per capita income grew from 1989 to 2002, "but individual earning power (as measured by median personal income) has not mirrored this trend," the report said.

Among other things, the Education Improvement Act required lower class sizes, alternative schools, appointed school superintendents and a minimum amount of money for teachers' supplies.

The report suggests several possible changes, including funding superintendents' salaries on the number of students in their districts, spending more money on alternative schools, lowering from 17 to 16 the age at which teen-agers may participate in adult education programs, giving teachers more money for instructional supplies and funding more school social workers.

The report is available on the Comptroller's Web site at www.comptroller.state.tn.us.